

Westminster Lectures

THE FREEDOM OF
THE WILL

BY

REV. A. B. SHARPE, M.A.

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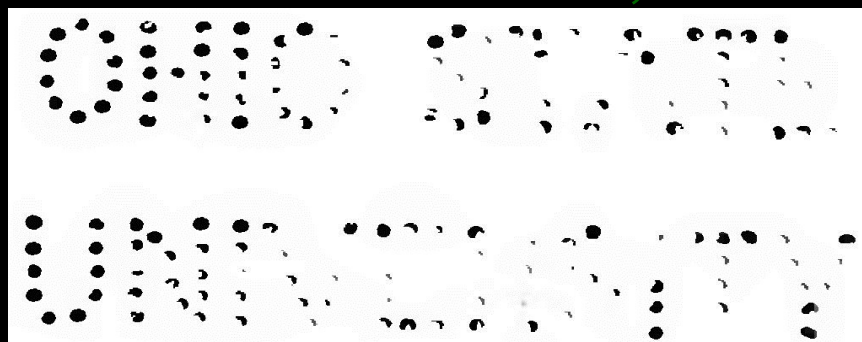
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY.

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**WESTMINSTER
LECTURES**

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REV. A. B. SHARPE, M. A.**



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PREFACE

THE peculiar difficulty which attends the consideration of the Will, with regard to its freedom or determination, lies in the fact that the subject is merely a division of a much larger one, and cannot be satisfactorily discussed without some attention to questions in which the Will is not directly concerned. The precise view which is taken of freewill and necessity must always depend mainly on the general principles of

psychology which are adopted.

The aim of the following lecture is therefore to expound one view of the matter, which is mainly that of what is called Scholastic Philosophy; and to show that it furnishes a more satisfactory explanation of the facts than any other.

This indeed would seem to be a fairly good reason for holding the view advocated; but it is not to be denied that opinions are held by many persons which render it impossible for them to do so. These

THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

WE may consider the Will from two distinct points of view. One is that of the philosopher, who seeks to determine what its nature and action are in themselves; the other is that of the theologian, who desires to gain some idea of its relation to the supreme will of God.

It is to the former aspect of the subject—the philosophical—that interest is chiefly directed at the present day. For the

Though I shall have a word to say on the theological question, I do not intend to discuss it at length, for the reasons I have given.

I would first of all remind you that the Council of Trent [*Sess. vi. can. 5.*] has defined the freedom of the Will to be of faith. Those therefore who accept the authority of the Catholic Church as final are bound to this conclusion. But no theory on the subject has ever been imposed by the Church as authoritative; and consequently, so long as we hold the Will to be free we are at liberty to

the one which has the highest degree of support. You are moreover fully within your right, whether as Catholics or as thinkers, if you choose to hold that the Will is free simply on negative grounds — *i.e.*, because the opposite view is certainly untenable; without adopting any positive argument in favour of your conclusion.

Before proceeding to consider the subject, we must first define the terms we are to employ. What precisely are we to understand by freedom, in this connection; and what

itself, in some degree at least, the cause of its own actions. Determinists, on the other hand, assert that the Will, however free to act in its own way, is set in motion and directed by causes external to itself, as everything else in the world is. A motorcar is free when the road before it is unobstructed and its machinery is working. But it can only move by the action of the driver upon it. Now the upholders of freewill maintain that the Will represents both car and driver: while Determinists hold that the

car alone represents the Will, which can only act when driven by an external cause. The Will is of course the only thing to which freedom in the former sense is ever ascribed.

Then what is to be understood by the Will? Our definition of it must depend on the view which we take of the constitution of human nature. If we consider that man is constituted by matter and nothing else, then the Will, in the only sense in which freedom can be attributed to it, cannot exist: it is practically identical with

present to the mind, and not merely, if at all, to the senses. A little reflection will, I think, convince us that we have the two faculties of Will and appetite, and that they are readily distinguishable from one another. They exist often in close connection with each other; as when, for instance, the appetite craves for dinner, and the Will thereupon fixes upon a menu which shall be agreeable, wholesome, and not too expensive; using for that purpose the intellect, which considers the

properties of different kinds of food; and the memory, which recalls their previous effects upon the bodily organs. They not unfrequently come into mutual opposition — as when the appetite demands something which the intellect, acting upon remembered physical experiences, or possibly upon medical advice, declares to be unwholesome, and the will consequently rejects what the appetite craves—or perhaps yields to it, with disastrous consequences.

The freedom of the Will is

difficult to believe that we are universally mistaken. This something is the sense of effort which more often than not accompanies choice; and the effort itself is by no means physical, though it is often associated with physical effort, but purely mental. It would seem that our idea of freedom depends in the last resort on this feeling of effort, of which we are aware in much the same way as that in which we are aware of our own existence and personal identity. From this consciousness we infer that we are

determining our choice is really only the influence of motives upon us: we imagine we are deliberating when we are really only submitting to the influences of contrary motives, of which the strongest prevails in the end.

The Determinist theory may be illustrated thus. Suppose a stone to be thrown straight up into the air: the impulse of the throw contends with and for a time overcomes the force of gravity: presently it slackens, and the stone is balanced for an instant in

equilibrium: then gravity prevails and the stone falls to earth. Suppose, further, that the stone is endowed with the power of thought, and imagine it reflecting on its actions, and thinking that it has chosen to fly upwards; then that it has, while in equilibrium debated with itself whether to ascend higher or to return to the ground, and decided on the latter alternative, and you will have a picture of the supposed freewill in action, deliberation, and decision.

I think it cannot be denied that there is much

to show our independence of character, or to surprise or shock our friends : if we succeed in avoiding one motive, it is only (as Professor Bain says) to fall into the arms of another. Secondly, it is equally obvious that the strength and influence of a motive are very largely determined by the character. For “what is one man's meat is another man's poison,” and what a man desires or does not desire, likes or dislikes, depends on what his character is. Thirdly, it must be admitted that the character is formed to a

inconceivable. I do not say, it must be observed, that the Will is uncaused; but that there is no necessity of thought which compels us to think of everything as caused by something else; there must be one thing at least which is not so caused.

4. But the foundation of the Determinist argument is the assumption that the Will necessarily acts under the influence of the strongest motive. This sounds well; but a very little consideration will show that the assumption is entirely baseless. What

motive: therefore I have no freedom of choice." We could hardly have a more flagrant instance of the circular form of argument.

This theory of the strongest motive has indeed some weight, if it is admitted that man has no Will at all, but is merely "a highly differentiated portion of the earth's crust and gaseous envelope," adrift on the tide of universal causation. But this is what the facts of the case, as we have already seen, do not allow us to admit.

There is, besides, a class

considerations which throw light on the nature of the Will's freedom and the method of its operation, and are at least interesting; and which we cannot leave entirely without notice.

We have already seen that Will is a faculty of the rational nature, and that its action is so far limited that it can only pursue intellectual ideas. I will now call your attention to another limitation of the Will's action; a very important, and I think a very obvious one. It can only seek what is good, or what at least appears to be

happiness that
circumstances will permit
us to secure.

*[Compare Bramhall
(Controversy with Mr
Hobbes): “Though the Will
be blind, yet its object is
good in general, which is
the end of all human
action.”]*

Thus a martyr chooses
torture and death because
of the perfect happiness to
which he believes they will
bring him: a poor mother
denies herself food and
clothing because, her
choice being limited by

any moment independent of the other). Therefore, in analysing the functions of the will, we must be careful not to confuse them with those of the intellect; strictly speaking, the Will cannot deliberate, nor the intellect choose. Consequently, it is the part of the intellect to estimate the relative value of different motives, and so to speak, to report on them to the Will, which then chooses the one which is considered on the whole to be the best. But again, it is the Will that initiates all action, whether mental or

initiating, or refusing to initiate the process of investigation in regard to any particular motive.

Let me try and illustrate the matter by a concrete example. I go into a shop to buy a hat; I necessarily desire the kind of hat that will contribute most to my happiness—that is to say a cheap one, a well-fitting one, and one of graceful appearance. Four hats are offered for my inspection, A, B, C, and D: I look at them all, and receive a certain intellectual impression of them in consequence. Then I begin

a careful examination of each one separately. I reject A, because it fails to fit my head; I reject B also, because it is too expensive; but I find C in every way suitable, so I buy it, and trouble myself no further about D. Now I might plainly, if I had chosen, have proceeded to examine D, and restrained my desire to possess C until I had done so: possibly in that case I might have found D to be an even more attractive hat than C. Then I should have had what has been called an *affective* Will towards C, but an *effec*, or

elective Will towards D.

[Rickaby, Moral Philosophy, p. 45: “What attracts the sensitive appetite, commonly allures also the effective Will, though on advertence the elective Will may reject it.”]

Or, again, I might, if I had been in a great hurry, have taken the first that came; I might have considered it more for my happiness to wear a hat too large for me than to waste time in choosing another. In either case I should have exercised my freedom in

rejecting it. "We needs must love the highest, *when we see it*" — so Lord Tennyson's King Arthur sums up the distinguishing features of all right action — perhaps with greater scientific accuracy than his literary creator intended.

The great merit that I would claim for this account of the Will's operation is that it explains all the facts for which explanation is required.

1. The sense of effort which accompanies choice is obviously caused by the force, greater or less, which the Will applies to the

5. We have seen that the Will, if it is free, must in a sense be self-moved. But there is certainly a difficulty in supposing it to be absolutely so. For it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive that there can be more than one thing which is self-moved. That one is of course the “primum movens,” the Source of all motion; and there cannot well be two such sources, much less a number equal to the myriads of individual human Wills.

But the solution of the difficulty is now within our

grasp. The Will can have no phenomenal cause outside itself, since its action is spontaneous, as some physical processes are said to be. [*Bain, The Emotions and the Will, p. 297 seq.*] But it depends on the first cause, the primal Source of life and energy, from which, like everything else, the Will derives its nature and action. This cause is God, who moves the Will to act, not as His instrument merely, but “*secundum proprietatem*” —according to its proper nature, an essential part of which is spontaneity, or freedom.

time; and “in aeternitate omnia simul”—in eternity all things are present—there is neither future nor past. It is from neglect of this consideration that the apparent difficulty has arisen.

This question is often confused with one which is perfectly distinct from it, and with which we are not now concerned, namely, how can God’s action as Creator be morally justified, seeing that He creates freely with the foreseen consequences of sin and suffering? I shall not attempt to answer this

which are lawfully held in the Church. It is easy enough, however, to arrive at a general conclusion, which will be sufficient for most people. If the Will is essentially free, it is certain that it must normally be so, whether influenced by Divine grace or not; and we need not wonder if we are unable to define precisely the mode in which Almighty God chooses to assist the Will without prejudicing its freedom; since, if that is the case, the operation of Divine grace only shares that obscurity in which the great majority

APPENDIX I

OF the numerous questions asked at the close of the foregoing lecture, very few bore directly on the subject to which it was confined; for the most part the questions dealt with problems arising out of the subject, and of great interest and importance in themselves, but not properly falling within the limits of a lecture on the freedom of the Will.

It would be merely tedious to reproduce the individual questions and

existence. But the point is simply that, as Materialism gives no account of the manner in which the material organism may be supposed to perform the functions which are called intellectual, we have nothing to support their view but their bare assertion, and the difficulty is really only put one step further back. If intelligence is a function of matter, we must be shown how it is seen to be so; if we are told that we need not suppose that we have a soul, because we can ascribe the functions which have been

reconciliation of the existence of evil with the justice and goodness of the Creator. For if the Will were determined, its choice of evil would be directly due to the Divine Will, instead of being at most indirectly due to it.

Secondly, it would be subversive of our necessary conception of a Divine Creator to suppose that the freewill of man can be a disturbing force in the order and harmony in which the goodness of the universe consists, and by means of which it is a worthy object of the Divine

contemplation. But this order and harmony, it would seem, can only be preserved from disturbance by the exercise of the freewill of creatures, by means of the attachment of suffering as a kind of makeweight to wrong action as its necessary consequence — as shadow is a necessary consequence of the interception of light by opaque bodies. The further question implied here, viz., why God should have made free creatures at all, in view of their certain errors of choice and consequent suffering,

APPENDIX 2

A GENERAL view of the subject may be gathered from the following works:—

Aquinas, St Thomas—
Summa Theologica
(especially I. QQ. 82, 83).

Aquinas, St Thomas—
Summa Contra Gentiles
(especially II. 66, and III. 1, 2).

Augustine, St—*De Dono Perseverantice.*

Augustine, St—*De Correptione et Gratia.*

Augustine, St—*De Prcedestinatione Sanctorum.*

Reason.

Locke—*Essay on the Human Understanding.*

Molina—*Liberi Arbitrii cum Gratiae Donis . . . Concordia.*

Mozley, J. B.—*The Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination.* Pascal—*Provincial Letters.*

Sanseverino—*Philosophia Christiana.*

Spencer, Herbert—*Principles of Psychology.*

Ward, W. G.—*Essays on the Philosophy of Theism.*

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